

March 7, 2024

President Xi Jinping
The State Council General Office
Beijingshi, People's Republic of China

Your Excellency:

The American Historical Association expresses grave concern for the fate of Professor Rahile Dawut, a scholar of Uyghur studies who has apparently been sentenced to life in prison and whose specific whereabouts are unknown.

Rahile Dawut is a professor at Xinjiang University in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and is a former member of the Chinese Communist Party as well as an internationally recognized expert in Uyghur folklore and traditions. She has received awards and grants from China's Ministry of Culture, and is the founder of the Minorities Folklore Research Center at Xinjiang University, the first-ever Uyghur folklore center. Her articles, including her studies on Islamic sacred sites in Central Asia, are featured in international journals and books, and she has presented her scholarship at conferences around the world. In keeping with the People's Republic of China's commitment to the representation and fair treatment of its 55 minority nationalities, we urge her release and habilitation.

Professor Dawut's whereabouts and details of her well-being remain unknown. Her family and friends announced her disappearance in August 2018. On June 30, 2021, authorities from Xinjiang University revealed to Radio Free Asia that Professor Dawut had been sentenced and imprisoned. She apparently has been detained and sentenced in connection with her peaceful exercise of the right to academic freedom—conduct that is expressly protected under international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory. The nature of her disappearance and detention, lack of information about her whereabouts, and reports of torture in “re-education camps” raise grave concerns about whether Professor Dawut has been afforded due process, and about her treatment and well-being. A life sentence for what we can only assume—absent clear public evidence from the state—to be nonviolent expressive conduct is clearly excessive and contrary to international standards. Professor Dawut's situation, moreover, raises questions about the ability of intellectuals in China generally to conduct scholarship safely and freely.

We respectfully urge you to secure Professor Dawut's immediate and unconditional release. Until this process is complete, we hope that you will publicly disclose the circumstances of her detention and sentencing, ensure her access to family and legal counsel, and guarantee that her case is addressed in a manner consistent with internationally recognized standards of due process.

The American Historical Association is the largest organization of professional historians in the world, with approximately 11,000 members spanning the globe. On behalf of this international network of scholars, we respectfully urge the release of Professor Rahile Dawut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James Grossman
Executive Director

cc:

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Ambassador Nicholas Burns
The Honorable Xie Feng
The Honorable Volker Türk